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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

AMATEUR HOUSE DECORATION.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE EDINBURGH ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION, BY JOHN MARSHALL, M.A.

PART III.



OW the danger is that those who have got bitten with the desire to make their rooms look pretty, will litter their rooms with far too many things, so that they get to have the appearance of a museum or bazaar. The delight of a really well furnished room is the impression of simple appropriateness in the choice and position of everything. Everything seems to have been suggested by a use, and to be fit for use where

it has been put.

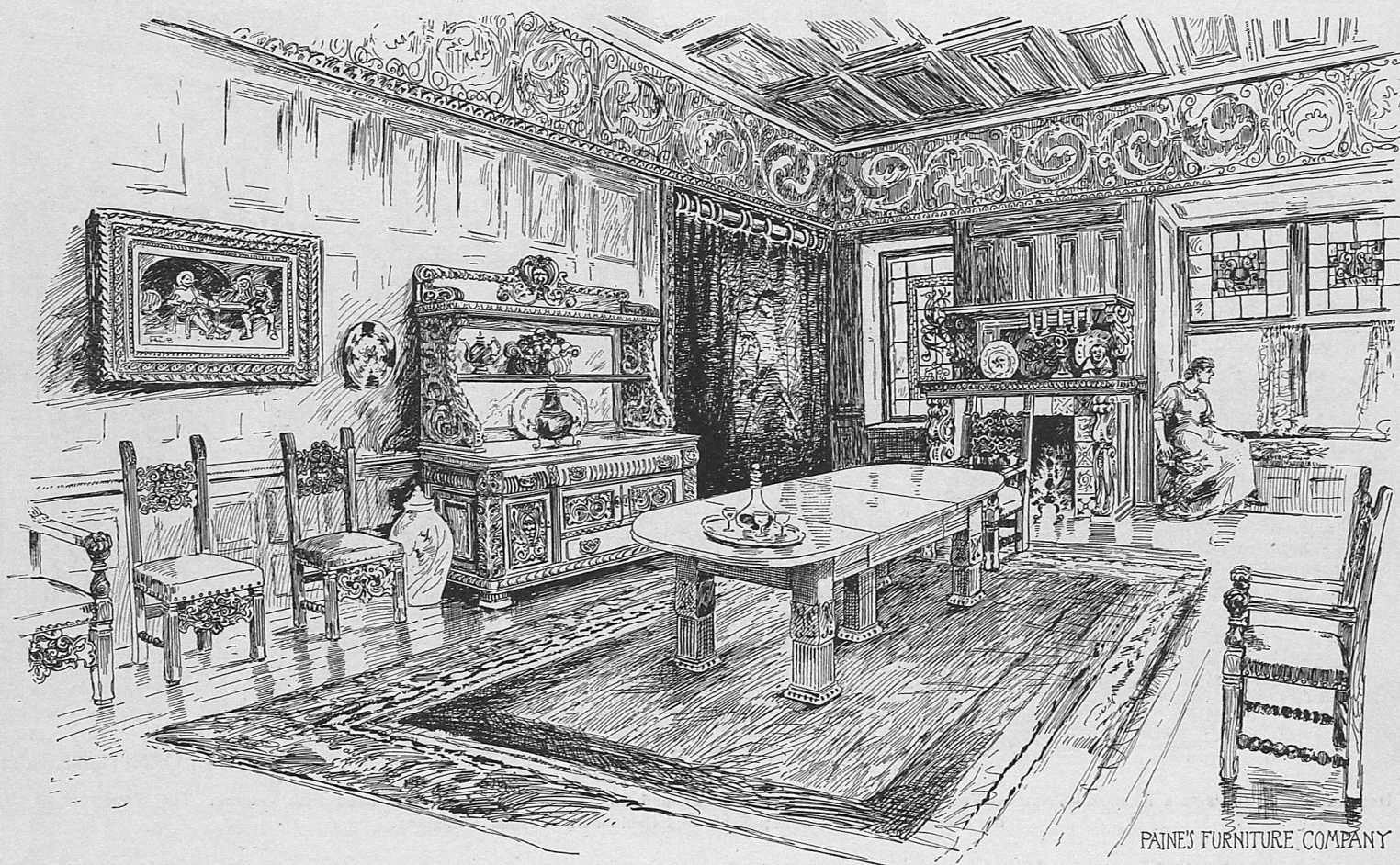
And even if we venture to go beyond actual utility, we need

a receptacle for unanswered letters, and so forth. And then, amidst all these fanciful utilitarian loveliness, for final bits of color, our pictures and marble medallions, and so forth, will rather add to, than detract from, the rich restfulness of our decoration.

Above all, no mere imitation of what we have seen elsewhere. It has been truly said, every fine work of art was, in the making, a brave experiment; and this is true of the decoration of a room as well as the painting of a picture, or the designing of a great building. We must be prepared to risk a good deal if we are ever to have a really well furnished home.

We must risk expense, to a greater or less degree; we must risk trouble and disappointment; we must risk occasionally being sneered or laughed at. It requires some courage for a young couple to resolve to do without a drawing-room so-called, simply because they don't require it. It requires some courage to have an oak cabinet where the conventional sideboard usually stands, or a tall eight-day clock, however fine, in your best sitting-room, or to abolish those horrors, Venetian blinds, or to decline to use Nottingham lace curtains, or antimacassars, or other monstrosities dear to the female mind.

And all such iconoclasms would be foolish if the iconoclast had not, by pains and study, and all possible preparation quali-



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DECORATIVE CHART FOR A DINING-ROOM.—Principal Features—Carved Sideboard of Dark Oak with Beveled Mirrors, massively Carved Oak Table, Arm-Chair and Side Chairs.

never go so far in order to obtain a decorative effect. Suppose we do not often need bellows in a drawing-room, there is no harm in having a really beautiful old pair of bellows, hand-painted, or brass-mounted, hanging by the fireside. We don't often use wine-coolers now, but a fine old Chippendale wine-cooler may well repose under our sideboard, itself as good a specimen as we can get. Linen-chests may not be much needed now in these days of frequent purchase and rapid wear, but a fine old carved, or inlaid, linen-chest may well decorate our hall and accommodate our boots or gloves. An ancient basket may reappear as a workbox in our drawing-room: an old inlaid tea-caddy as a stationery cabinet; a Nankin vase or bowl as a visitors' card-basket. An old Sheraton hot-plate-carrier will make a capital waste-paper basket; an old music Canterbury, an excellent stand for flowers; an old double-back settee, a music-stool, much more comfortable and convenient than the modern ones; an old brass embossed pipe-box from Nuremberg,

fied himself a little to build up as well as to destroy; to supply something of his own as well as get rid of what is everybody's, or nobody's. Teachableness, humility, readiness to believe that there is much to learn from other people, especially from artist, these are the first conditions of our ever coming to our true selves. Nothing is more common, or more wretched, than to hear the silly cackle of ignorant amusement at the efforts of people who have spent years of study in the pursuit of art. People that never gave more thought to the real nature of beauty than a sheep, will pronounce, with easy confidence, this to be ugly and that absurd, when one knows perfectly well that what it really comes to is no more than this, that they have not been accustomed to see it. But one has hopes of those who are struck dumb, whether pleasurably or painfully, before a fine piece of artistic workmanship. In time they too may do something; through silence they will in time feel their way to utterance.

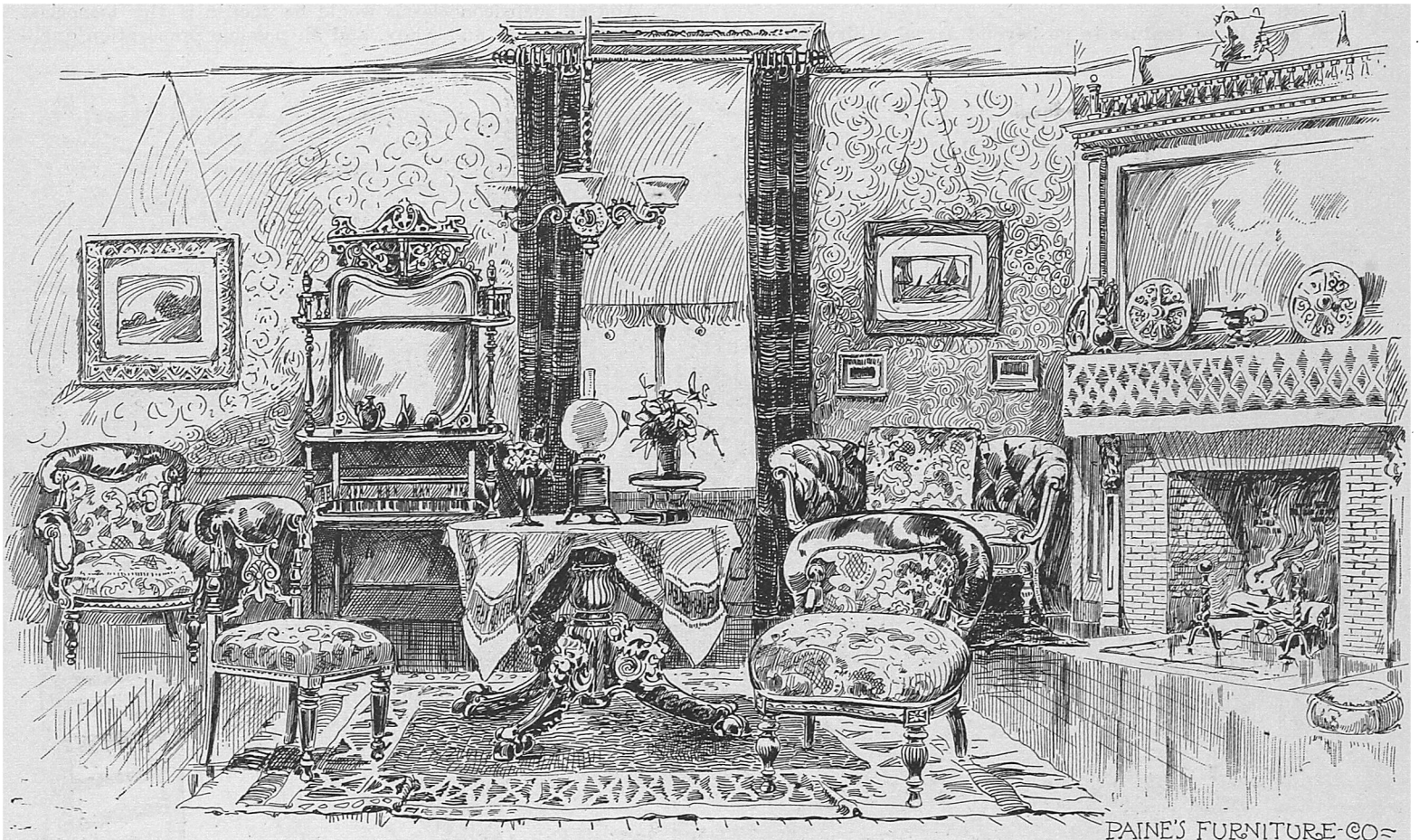
THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

You will observe that I have used the word *old* pretty often, and in the use of that word is disclosed an idiosyncrasy of my own—a love for antiques. That is a love that one shares with a good many people now, and we often hear it characterized as a craze. It is very possible that extravagant pieces are often given for old furniture or tapestries, but that is usually for historical specimens of unique elaboration and beauty. For myself I must confess to have neither the taste nor the cash for collecting after this fashion. But my own experience is simply this, that even now, by care and watchfulness, by knowing what one wants and why one wants it, and what it ought to cost, at least approximately, it is possible to get genuine specimens of fine antique work, certified to be fine by the fact that they have stood the usage of a hundred years or more, for far smaller sums than one would have to pay for articles equally sound in workmanship and perhaps as good, probably not so good in design, or modern manufacture. What one has to do is to settle quite clearly what things one really needs in a given room; make shift without for six months or twelve months, till the right thing turns up and then buy unflinchingly. Whatever spare sums you

been shown sideboards and cabinets and so forth by people who had bought them for antiques, of which the backs and sides were really of half-inch wood that had never been even planed; only plastered over with brown stain and coarse varnish; and the carving, save the mark, was worthy of a cowboy.

For those who have not the time or the capacity to become adepts in old furniture, there is now abundance of honest artistic work made that will stand the same test, but it is and must be costly. Avoid, as you would the plague, aesthetic suites, only twenty guineas the lot. If you have only twenty guineas to spare, buy one good piece, and use rush-bottomed chairs at six shillings each till you can spend another twenty guineas.

If only you will take the trouble to get a pleasing background of harmonious tint and flowing line in your wall-papers, and varnish your floor, and put down a few good Oriental rugs almost any furniture, the plainer the better, and the more comfortable the better, will look fairly well, and, with patience, will be continually mending. Have nothing to do with Furnish on the Hire System; furnish throughout in three days; and all other be-puffed insanities. Have a mind of your own, and



DECORATIVE CHART FOR A PARLOR.—Principal Features—Divan, Reception Chair, and Chairs of Brocaded Silk, trimmed with Velours. The Woodwork of all the Pieces is in Dead Gold; Table and Cabinet in Polished Mahogany.

have over you should hoard up till some single object, a cabinet a clock, an old settee, a fine piece of tapestry, something which you know is fine, and which you have good reason to believe you have a suitable place for, comes into the market, buy it and then lay by for a year or two years. There are few people who could not spare twenty or fifty pounds perhaps annually for furnishings. Do not squander it. Concentrate it, and, if you can, get rid of something inferior as part payment. Be continually improving in this way, and in ten or twelve years, with care and taste, and patience, you will have a houseful, or what will seem a houseful, of fine things.

Above all never buy anything because it is a bargain. Never buy at random because a thing turns up cheap, for which you were never conscious of a need; otherwise you will get your house littered with rubbish. It has been at times a painful experience to me to see people who wanted to make their house pretty, begin to degrade it by the introduction of sham antiquities, with workmanship that would disgrace an egg-box. A really good piece of furniture, old or new, is good to look at from any distance, is good to feel with the sensitive forefinger, behind, before, at the joints, within the recesses, everywhere. I have actually

patience and common sense, and you will furnish really well, and really cheaply.

Those, on the other hand, who have large resources cannot do better than give one of our actual artists in decoration a chance. Do not merely give him the bare walls and *carte blanche*; but let him get to know you, and see how you live, and what your tastes and habits are. Try to get his sympathy, and try to get into sympathy with him. Think out things with him, submit suggestions, modifications, difficulties, and in the end you may have the great honor and delight of having a house at once new, and fine, and characteristic, not only of the artist, but of yourself. To produce a house thoroughly artistic and original, and thoroughly adapted both to the general modern tastes and habits, and also to the particular tone and character of its inhabitants, this is a rare triumph; one that may well tax the ingenuity and the tastes of both the artist and his employer, or, I should prefer to say, his friend. For the art of decoration stand in this particular position compared with the other arts, that not only must its product satisfy somebody when it is done, otherwise it will not be bought, but it must be an expression of somebody else besides the artist throughout, or it

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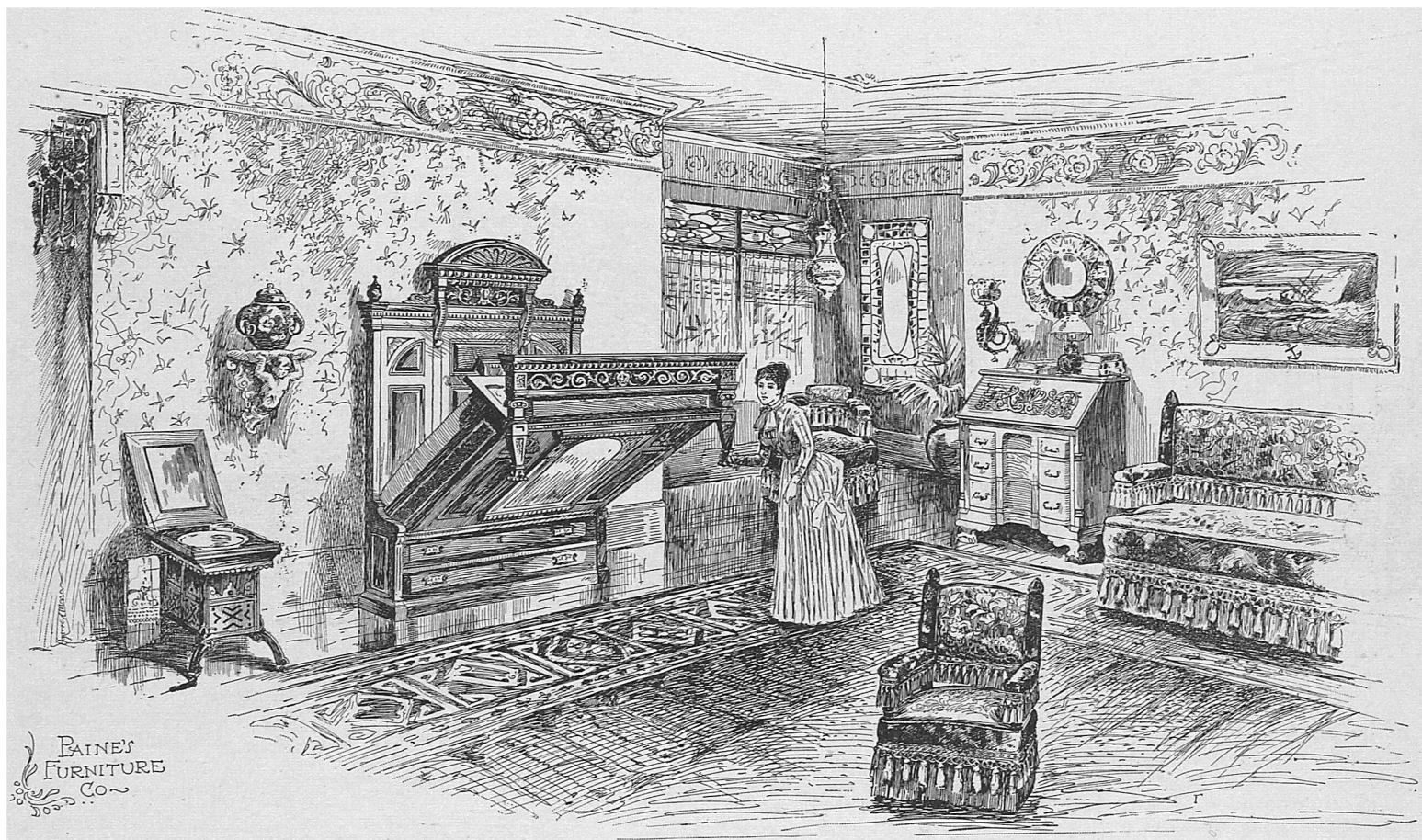
will be a failure. In nothing as in house decoration is the lay element with the artistic so absolutely indispensable.

For myself, in my own small way, I have found the greatest help and comfort in co-operating with and resting on the skill and experience of the artists to whom has been intrusted what decoration I could afford. The pleasure is, it may be believed a mutual one; and no artist worthy of the name is so happy as when he is working for and with a layman who is interested and watchful, and ready to suggest and criticise. No artist can be continually spinning, so to speak, out of his own entrails; it is in the reaction of outside requirements, and outside tastes, or even eccentricities, that he continually finds new material.

And I readily admit that, though it involves a greater risk, yet it implies a higher function to produce, or aid in producing, new artistic work, which shall be really representative of our time to future generations, than merely to gather and adapt the productions of a past age. Only, if one is to do this higher work, one must be prepared to do it well; in other words, one must be prepared to face the cost—one must be rich. For people of very moderate purses like myself, I believe the best way

I find myself gravely informed in books on decoration that if your room is Renaissance you must not introduce any Queen Anne features; if it is Queen Anne, you must have nothing Victorian, and so on. And every man of any backbone instantly kicks at your "musts" and "must nots," and rightly says he will have what suits him in his rooms. The best compliment that has ever been paid to my own place is, that it looks as if it had been lived in for ever so long. That simply means that it is a mass of incongruities if you like, which are mine, which express me,—a poor thing, if you like, but mine own. And that is why I insist so strongly on our professional decorators trying to carry their people along with them. A scrap of living feeling is worth a bushel of theory, and life, with its infinity of various suggestions, is continually teaching those who have the faculty of sympathy, far more than all the books.

This by no means implies that the decorative artist is to allow himself to be annihilated. On the contrary I believe his best chance of truly asserting himself, of realising himself, so to speak, is through continual contact, like Antaeus, with his mother earth, in the shape of the notions and prejudices, and



DECORATIVE CHART FOR A COMBINED PARLOR AND BEDROOM.—Principal Features—Parlor Bed, in Richly Figured Mahogany, with Full-Length Beveled Mirror in front, Colonial Desk Dressing-Table, in Mahogany, to match; Sofa and Arm-Chair, in Brocatelle, trimmed with Plush.

is to act the chifoneer, and "pick up something," as Micawber would say.

The rock ahead, it seems to me, in the constructive decoration of a house *ab initio*, is the difficulty of avoiding that fatal sense of completeness, of everything being *en suite*, done to pattern, carried out according to rule. Your design looks very pretty, and the room, when finished, might look very well, if only no intrusive people were going to live in it. What is the use of designing an absolutely correct Renaissance room, or Queen Anne room, or what you please, when the inhabitants, with their modern dress and modern habits, will inevitably destroy the illusion as soon as they enter it? One is haunted with the same sense of unreality in a "restored" church; every detail that is not consistent with rule, with the design of the period as laid down by analytical students of the art, has been carefully eliminated, with the inevitable result that the whole life and interest of the building, is eliminated too. Life is a delightfully incongruous, disorderly, unruly fact; it declines rule; it laughs at precedent, and deportment, and pedantry; its whole charm is in its continually various self adaptation to infinite circumstance and chance.

"fads," if you like, of plain commonsense people. Of course this involves many difficulties in these days of impatience and haste. You can't get over the ground as fast on this plan, as when you simply have the rooms measured, the aspects and a few other material facts settled, and then plan out your scheme according to rule and routine. But nothing really fine can be got in that way; and, as I have already said, a house decorated on that plan only begins to be really beautiful when the real people who are to live in it proceed to spoil the decorative pedant's designs, as their individual tastes and necessities demand.

One of the most valuable services the artists can perform is to elicit, as he may perhaps for the first time do, the individuality of those who seek his assistance. People are so apt to be like sheep in these matters; to deliberately suppress their own tastes, and submit to the wretched traditional practices of the world about them, that the greatest kindness that any one can do to them is to help them to realize that they too may have a word to say in the world. That just as the voice, and gait, and look of every human being is something quite unique—has something in it different from what ever has been or ever will be seen or

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heard in the world's history—so their capacities of impressing themselves on their visible surroundings are severally different and the whole value of their life lies in such differences. The recognition of this fact, of the absolutely individual and personal difference of every human soul in small things as in great, runs down to the root of all that is fine in art or in morals; it is the basis of everything essentially interesting or inspiring in human life. And if it is a fine thing to pierce down through the wretched shell of convention and fashion to the real living man or woman in matters of feeling or conduct, it is a fine thing to do the same, if we can, even in such matters as our clothing or our furniture. "I am a man; nothing appertaining to a man do I hold to be alien to myself"—not even his chairs or his window blinds.

After all, in decorative art, as in all other art, as in all other things human, the final question is one of character. Only character may fail to express itself adequately in a particular direction from prejudice or other accidental impediment. Puritanism in this country has long fought against the adequate expression of character in our churches and dwellings. But I am glad to believe that this is rapidly changing, and I am confident

the sympathetic recognition and cultivation of things beautiful.

The half-awakened eye needs guidance in its search of a response to the appeal of æsthetic impressions; and since, in a mechanical methodical age the body, as well as the mind has a tendency to become specialized, and with cramping, fixed habits, grace and ease of movement become difficult and rare, as natural and expressive action disappears with natural conditions of life; so that in our complex and unlovely civilization the laws of harmony, the sense of art, the language of line and curve, in the expression of beauty are only slowly recovered, if at all, by careful and conscious study.

With the gradual, and in some cases complete, removal of life from the beauty of wild nature in big cities, the loss of the daily countless impressions of beauty—of harmony of colors and stimulus to the imagination, common to a life in the woods and fields, it is hardly, perhaps, appreciated in its full meaning, especially in the effect of its absence in early life when impressions of all kinds are strong. All these causes daily and hourly at work, with habits of mind and body, cramping and mechanical conditions of work, indoor life, a restricted space and movement—all these causes can only be counteracted or mitigated in any degree



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DECORATIVE CHART FOR A BEDROOM.—Principal Features—Bedstead of Massive Oak, Dresser with Large Beveled Plate Glass, Washstand and Toilet Table.

that the *perferendum ingentium Scotorum*, with its national dash, and fire, and resolution, will again and soon blossom forth into color and grandeur. Every Scotsman boasts, and justly, of the faculty for color in our Scottish pictorial art; I believe, ere long, we shall show that the faculty is not confined to painting. To that end we all want to remember Danton's grand maxim—a maxim which points the way to fine work in all departments of life. *De l'audace, et de l'audace et toujours de l'audace*. Timidity is the curse of life; let a man take his life bravely in his hands, do what he himself feels to be for him the best, and it will be the best.

THE GOSPEL OF BEAUTY gains an even wider hearing; its message is, indeed, a much needed one in the modern world, which is apt to shut its eyes to all that distracts from the main business, (or the whole duty) of man—to make money. Until it is discovered that the faculties which are concentrated on the supreme ideal of "making a pile"—to say nothing of the faculties consumed in the pitiful struggle for a bare subsistence—are not in condition, or perhaps are the very reverse of those wanted in

by a study of the laws and impressions of beauty. And therefore a work such as that of Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Russell should be especially valuable.

Few indeed are more constant and devoted exponents of this gospel of beauty of which I have spoken, and as lecturers they have done much to elucidate, and to simplify by familiar illustrations in common life, in speech, bearing and action, and domestic decoration those principles of beauty which underlie all varieties of its manifestation in life as in art. Indeed, as exponents of this system of Delsarte, they aim, I believe, to reduce the laws of graceful movement and appropriate dramatic expression and action to almost scientific precision and definiteness.

But since the arts are human, and since the apple was given to Aphrodite, humanity all the world over, in all sorts and conditions own her power; and I believe the appeal to the eye is too potent, and life too involved in life itself for the satisfaction of the one in the perfection of the other ever to cease to be ardently desired.—Walter Crane, in a *Preface to a Delsartean Scrap-Book*.